DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 315 816 CS 507 051

AUTHOR Brinkle, Lydle
TITLE Anton Chekhov: Yalta Years, 1899-1904.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Authors; *Biographies; Foreign Countries; Playwriting; *Russian Literature; Short Stories; *Twentieth Century Literature
IDENTIFIERS *Chekhov (Anton Pavlovich); Russia

ABSTRACT

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov spent 6 of the last 7 years of his life at Yalta (located on the Crimean Peninsula) where he had a house constructed in order that he might live in a climate favorable to his failing health. During these years Chekhov married the actress Olga Knipper and met Leo Tolstoy, who was near the end of his life. Chekhov also exchanged letters with Maxim Gorky concerning writing style and technique. As he became more ill with tuberculosis, Chekhov was able to work less, but he recovered sufficiently to work on a number of short stories and to finish his play, "The Cherry Orchard." On a visit with Olga to a spa in Baderweiler, Germany in 1904, Chekhov became seriously ill and died. His house in Yalta is now a museum. (KEH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED315816

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Lydle Brinkle

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ANTON CHEKHOV: YALTA YEARS, 1899-1904

Lydle Brinkle

Gannon University

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov was born in the city of Taganrog on the north shore of the Sea of Azov on January 17, 1860. Anton was spared from serfdom since his grandfather had purchased the freedom of his family from a wealthy landowner. Chekhov's father, Pavel, ran a grocery store in Taganrog, but soon fled to Moscow to avoid debtor's prison. Anton was abandoned in Taganrog, but managed to finish high school in 1879. With the aid of a scholarship by the city he went to Moscow to study medicine while living with his parents. He graduated from medical school in 1884, but not before a number of his short stories were published. In 1885 he visited St. Petersburg and discovered he was a well-known writer. The following year his book, Motley Stories, was published and his real literary career began. In 1887 he earned fame as a playwright when his play Ivanov was produced. That same year his new book In the Twilight, a collection of short stories, was published and won for him the noted Pushkin Prize in 1888. The Steppe (1888) won him much recognition and established his position as one of Russia's leading writers. His plays The Sea Gull (1896), Uncle Vanya (1897), The Three Sisters (1901), and The Cherry Orchard (1903) would forever endear him in the hearts of Russians and others. Outside the Soviet Union, Chekhov's fame largely rests as that of a playwright. He also greatly influenced Western short story writing.[1]

This paper is a brief look and description of Chekhov's life in Yalta during 1899 until May 1, 1904, when he departed the city for the last time. In particular, this paper will describe Chekhov's house there, some of its contents, his garden, and various individuals associated with the house and Chekhov. In December, 1988 this writer visited that house, photographed some of its interior, and interviewed its curator. The house is currently a museum which preserves many photographs, personal effects, and works associated with Chekhov, his life, family, and friends.

Yalta is located on the Crimean Peninsula, which juts southward into the Black Sea. The city hugs the coastline of the peninsula along which runs a narrow plain that is often broken by bluffs and hills. To the rear

CS507051

of Yalta, the Crimean Mountains rise to heights of 5,000 feet. Roses, cypresses, acacia trees, lilacs, and sweet-smelling magnolias lend an effervescence to the atmosphere of this place. The greater Yalta area has a sub-tropical or Mediterranean climate. Washed by the warm waters of the Black Sea, and protected by the mountains from the cold northern winds, Yalta has long been a spot for holidays and vacations. Orchards and vineyards run right down to the edge of the sea, where fine beaches are washed by the surf. Yalta is beautiful the year round.[2]

In tsarist times the nobility regularly visited the villas and mansions in and around Yalta, and when Chekhov lived there the city counted some 20 rest homes, 14 hotels, and a 45-bed sanatorium to treat patients with tuberculosis. Not far from Chekhov's house is the Livadia Palace, a former royal residence. Tsar Nicholas II and his family spent summer vacations in it.[3] Chekhov spent a month in the "Rossiya" (now "Tauride") hotel in 1894. While there he attended social functions, dinners, and other festivities at the bequest of friends, dignitaries and the like. The climate of Yalta was supposedly good for Chekhov's health. Late in 1894 when he returned to Melikhovo, he was feeling good and took a suntan with him.[4]

In October, 1898 Chekhov purchased a small lot in Upper Autka, a village on the west side of Yalta. He had visited Yalta several times previously but had no plans to live there. However, the death of his father that month weighed heavily on his mind, and he decided to remain in Yalta and invite his mother and sister (Maria) to join him there. He no longer desired to return and live on his estate of Melikhovo near Moscow. During his health crisis in the spring of 1897, Chekhov had been ordered by his doctors to spend the winter in the south of Russia (Crimea). He thought about returning to Taganrog to live, but the cold winter climate there ruled out that location.[5] He acquired tuberculosis in 1893, but as far as is known he never told his family about his disease, which would cause his death when he was but 44 years of age.[6]

Maria came to Yalta in mid-October to join her brother and discuss with him his plans. Upon hearing that an architect had been contracted to build a house on Anton's lot, Maria set about to lend assistance and ideas for its construction. Nevertheless, in Chekhov's mind, Yalta was no Moscow--a city vibrant with theatres, actors, and all the amenities that it had to offer. However he did not dwell continually in Yalta, but would escape it on occasional visits to Moscov, or vacations elsewhere in Russia. Twice more he visited Western Europe.[7] According to Olga Knipper, "He had to live in Yalta, while his heart was drawn to Moscov".[8] Margarshack states that Chekhov always was despondent when the theatre season was at its peak in Moscov, and he was in Yalta.[9]

Chekhov began the construction of his house in the autumn of 1898, which was beautiful, following a rainy September. He supervised the building of the house, which was mainly built from stone and plaster. Its foundation was laid by Turkish laborers. His house, the trees he planted, and the landscaping all bore the imprint of his inspiration and creativeness.[10] Olga Knipper described the setting of Chekhov's lot as "a wilderness, with a few old pear trees".[11] Once he began work on it, she described his activities accordingly:

> He drew a plan of the garden (with Maria's help) ...ordering trees and bushes from all parts of Russia, making espalier fences of pear-and apple

trees, and in the end he had magnificent crops of peaches, apricots, cherries, apples and pears, with tender care he watched over a birch tree... pruned his standard roses...and tended the eucalyptus planted by his favorite seat....The avenue of acacias grew up incredibly fast....There were Japanese trees, too, a spreading plum-tree with red leaves, huge currants, vines and almond trees, and pyramidal poplars...[12]

Chekhov paid 4,000 rubles for the lot and 10,000 rubles (mortgage) for the house. Mary noted that much of his attention was centered on the garden. Assisting Chekhov were two Turks who worked in the soil: sometimes they extracted old vines from it; then they raked it and shifted the soil until it was level. At Chekhov's requests they dug holes wherever he decided that a tree should be planted. Chekhov planted the trees himself, moving from hole to hole to insert the small saplings. He liked rose-trees and cypresses but cared little for evergreens. In a letter to Menshikov (February 20, 1899) he wrote "that if he had not been a writer he would like to have been a gardener".[14]

While awaiting the completion of his house, Chekhov lived in a hotel in Yalta, and Olga Knipper, on her visits to Yalta, staved at Dr. Leonid Sredin's. Olga noted that Chekhov would go daily to Autka to check on the construction of his house. He wanted to assure himself that work was being done on it. Olga frequently went with him, and was concerned about his eating habits since he often forgot or skipped meals.[16] Chekhov and Olga Knipper met for the first time in September, 1898, when he attended a rehearsal by the Moscov Art Theater of his play The Sea Gull.[17]

In 1898 Chekhov and Maxim Gorky exchanged letters with one another. Gorky, another well-known Russian writer, wrote to Chekhov to see if he could suggest improvements in his style and technique of writing. This Chekhov did, and in March, 1899 Gorky journeyed to Yalta and met with Chekhov.[18]

On July 20, 1899, Chekhov wrote to Maria describing the House:

> Our Yalta house is very nice. We don't want a better one. The rooms are small, but you don't notice it very much. The view from your room is so lovely that I am beginning to feel sorry we did not have this house before. The wing of the house is finished. It is cozy and charming. All the trees I planted have taken root...[19]

On July 29, 1899, he wrote to Maria:

> The almond tree (with red blossoms) is blooming magnificently in our Autka property and it is a joy. The house is going up and work is at a fever heat.[20]

By August, 1899 Chekhov was living in his Autka house while work continued on it. He wrote to Maria on the 29th of that month:

> The kitchen is already done and Maryusha's room as well. The parquet is being laid in your room. They wanted to hang the wallpaper but I told them to wait until you arrived. Mother's and my rooms will be ready by the first of September, i.e., the flooring and

wallpaper and window fittings will be in... I am living in the wing and have fixed myself up cozily. The place is cramped with all the stuff and your cupboard, where I keep my underwear, has rendered great service. All the things arrived intact. The table linen is in good condition, undamaged, and there are lots of towels. The cupboard reached here safely. They are also not going to touch the walls in the entrance hall until your arrival. Only Mama and I will have wallpaper. The waterproofing is being rushed through. The water in the well is good...[21]

Chekhov spent most of September, 1899 in his small study writing The Lady with a Dog. His study contained a desk, where he worked, and a divan where he would lie to rest when tired. The room also contained a huge square window, the top part of which consisted of stained glass.[22]

On September 29, 1899 he wrote to Olga Knipper:

We are occupying our house now, use the dining room and have a piano.[23]

In November, 1899, Chekhov began writing In the Ravine, a story about village life in Central Russia. He also wrote At Christmas Time in the same year.[24]

In another letter to Olga (February 14, 1900) Chekhov wrote:

The willow tree is green all over...The almond tree is in blossom. I've set up benches all over the garden, not fancy ones with iron legs, but plain, wooden ones, which I am painting green. I've put up three little bridges across the brook and am setting out some palms...[25]

In the spring, 1900 the Moscow Art Theatre actors came to Yalta and gave eight performances. When not performing they were found at Chekhov's home leisurely passing their time.

When the Moscow Art Theatre Company left Yalta in April, 1900, Olga Knipper departed with them. Chekhov had been contemplating marriage to her. He went to Moscow briefly in May to see her, but the weather there was inhospitable and he hastened back to Yalta. In July Olga came to Yalta and there their love blossomed. Olga left in August for Moscow knowing their love for each other was genuine. They corresponded frequently from that time on.[26]

While at home (in Yalta) he seldom stayed at one place for any length of time. He would work his garden awhile, move to his courtyard, then read and write in his study, then perhaps walk around the terrace of his house. Whenever he felt uncomfortable he would move to another location. Often his movements were the result of annoyance by guests or visitors.[27]

On January 2, 1900 he wrote Olga Knipper:

Levitan is with us. Over my fireplace he has painted a picture of a moonlit night during haying season. There's a meadow, sheaves, woods in the distance and a moon reigning over all.[28]

In September, 1901, Leo Tolstoy visited Crinea for the last time. His health was bad. He stayed at the dacha of Countess Pauina in the town of Gaspra. (Her dacha is now the Yasnaya Polyana Sanatorium). Tolstoy

met both Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky on his visit one day, and recorded in his diary: "Gorky and Chekhov came. I am glad I liked both, especially the former". Gorky, under surveillance by the police, had been denied permission to live in Yalta, so Chekhov invited him to stay at his house in Autka, which was outside the city limits of Yalta. Gorky had previously stayed at the home of the artist Yartsev in 1900.[29]

At the end of September, 1901 Chekhov returned to Yalta from Moscow without his wife. He soon missed Olga and wrote to her his intentions of having a child with her. In Moscow, Olga brooded over their separation, but her love for Chekov was weighted equally by her passion for her career in the theatre. Her spirit and mind was in Yalta and Moscow simultaneously and she did not know which place drew her sentiments the most.

In Yalta, Chekhov spent the fall of 1901 contemplating writing, but without any real zeal. Yalta was beautiful that season, and the mild climate kept the flowers with their summer appearance. Chekhov wandered about his garden and strolled outside in the sunshine. Olga came and went between Yalta and Moscow, but Chekhov was only content when she was with him. His tuberculosis became more acute with time and he realized that it was sapping his energy and strength. Time was important to him, as he knew the disease was taking its toll. He could only guess when it would end his existence.

Chekhov grew extremely ill in December, 1901, but recovered sufficiently by early January, 1902 to plan creatively for a new play (The Cherry Orchard). Still he took walks in his garden, and occasionally down to the sea. Olga visited him in February, and again in the spring following a miscarriage, and the two spent most of the summer in a lodge near Moscow. Chekhov returned to Yalta in August, and then journeyed to Moscow in October where he stayed until the end of November. Returning to Yalta was painful without Olga, but the next April (1903) he returned to Moscow and remained there until near summer's end. Together they went to Yalta, and Olga stayed there until September before departing for Moscow. Chekhov then finished writing The Cherry Orchard, and in October forwarded the play to Moscow. Within a month he was there to advise and help Stanislavsky produce a stage version of it.[30]

The Cherry Orchard was produced by the Moscow Art Theatre on January 17, 1904 - Chekhov was there, and returned to Yalta for the spring, then departed it the last time on May 1 for Moscow. He was seriously ill during the journey and had to take bed rest in Moscow until June. He and Olga journeyed to Baderveiler, a spa in Germany, on June 3. There he died July the 2nd, and his body was shipped back to Moscow where it was buried in Novodevichy cemetery.[31]

The Chekhov House-Museum in Yalta is located at 112 Kirov Street. His friends called it his "Balaya Dacha" (White Country House). The house, an elegant structure, has remained as it was in Chekhov's time. Here much that is linked with writer's life and work is carefully preserved. Its current curator, Hanilo Alla, has served in this position since 1957 when Chekhov's sister, Maria, died. Maria lived in the house when Chekhov died and became its curator until her death.

The house has 9 rooms, four of which are on the ground floor. Chekhov's bedroom was upstairs. A hallway on the second floor contains a cabinet in which is stored some of Chekhov's hats, shirts, the coat he wore to Sakhalin Island, and other clothing articles. An adjacent room

next to the cabinet was his mother's bedroom, in which articles of her wardrobe are on display. Evgenia, Chekhov's mother, came to the house in 1898 and lived here until she died in 1919, when she was 83 years old. In her room is a portrait of her painted by her daughter, Maria, around 1899. The room also contains a picture of Chekhov taken just after his wedding in 1901.

Chekhov's wife, Olga Knipper, had her bedroom on the ground floor. She came to the house in 1899 and stayed here until 1900. She returned occasionally when she was free from her work in the theatre, usually in the summer. There is a large oil painting of Olga in her bedroom done by the painter Sredin in 1902-03. Photographs in the room include those of Chekhov in 1903, Chekhov and Olga after their wedding, a photograph of Chekhov in 1899 (the first he gave Olga), and one of Olga given to Chekhov on his birthday in 1903. Olga died in 1959 when she was 91 years old, and is buried in the Novodevichy Cemetery in Moscow with Chekhov.

Some of the other objects in the house include the bag Chekhov used on the journey to Sakhalin (1890), a bell given to him by a prisoner on the island, a wardrobe cabinet used by his mother in Taganrog and which he wrote about in The Cherry Orchard, a painting of the Istra River by Levitan, a cabinet containing glasses belonging to Chekhov's parents, manuscripts and proofs of Chekhov's last story, The Bride (1903), an old wall telephone which he used, dozens of photographs on the walls, tables, etc. In the guest room is an inkwell given to Chekhov by Stakhovich, the stage-struck adjutant of Moscow's Governor General. Chekhov didn't like it. Dr. Alshuller, Chekhov's doctor, took it to America and brought it back to the house. In one corner of Chekhov's garden is a bench on which he and Maxim Gorky used to sit and engage in long conversations.

Guests and visitors to see Chekhov in his home included: M. Gorky, I. Bunin, A. Kuprin, N. Teleshov, Garin-Mikhailovsky, I. Levitan, S. Rakhmaninov, V. Korolenko, V. Vasnetsov, G. Yartsev, A. Spendiarov, D. Mamin-Sibiryak, Chalyapin, and the actors of the Moscow Art Theatre.

Chekhov, a capable doctor, never treated patients in his house, but did make house calls. The sanatorium "Yauzlar", where he used to treat tuberculosis patients, has been renamed the "Chekhov" in honor of him. Chekhov is close to the heart of every Russian, and his works have been published in 44 countries of the world.[32]

Notes

1Ann Dunnigan, Chekhov: The Major Plays. New York: The New American Library, 1964, p. i. William Benton, Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 5, 1971, pp. 371-373.

2Information furnished by Intourist in Yalta.

3Yalta. Intourist, 1988, p. 1.

4Beatrice Saunders, Tchehov, the Man. Philadelphia; Dufour Editions, 1961, pp. 113-115.

5Ronald Hingley, A New Life of Anton Chekhov. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976, pp. 231-240.

6Benton, op. cit., 372.

7Hingley, op. cit., pp. 240-242.

8Constance Garnett (editor), The Letters of Anton Pavlovitch Tchehov

to Olga Leonardovna Knipper. New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1966, pp. 11, 31-32.

9David Magarshack, Chekhov. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1970, p. 346.

10Garnett, op. cit., pp. 31-32.

11Ibid, p. 6.

12Ibid, p. 8

13Magarshack, op. cit., p. 325.

14Ibid, p. 350.

15Hingley, op. cit., pp. 244-248.

16Magarshack, op. cit., p. 342.

17Garnett, op. cit., p. 4.

18Hingley, op. cit., pp. 248-249.

19Magarshack, op. cit., p. 343.

20Lillian Hellman, (editor) The Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov. New York: Farrar, Straus and Company, 1955, p. 239.

21Ibid, pp. 245-246.

22Magarshack, op. cit., p. 345.

23Hellman, op. cit., p. 250.

24Magarshack, op. cit., p. 269.

25Hellman, op. cit., p. 269.

26Magarshack, op. cit., pp. 351-354.

27S.S. Koteliansky, (editor) Anton Chekhov: Literary and Theatrical Reminiscences. New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1965, pp. 152-157.

28Hellman, op. cit., p. 258.

29Yalta, op. cit., p. 117.

30Saunders, op. cit., pp. 172-185.

31Garnett, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

32Interview with Hanilo Alla, curator of the Chekhov Museum, Yalta, in December, 1988.